

2005 Auto Theft Prevention

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Report to the State of Minnesota
Governor and Legislature



Report prepared by

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AUTO THEFT PREVENTION PROGRAM
Minnesota Statutes 2004, Section 65B.84
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PROGRAM MISSION

To reduce motor vehicle theft and its consequences in the State of Minnesota by funding programs which aid in the:

- Identification of Critical Issues
- Education and Awareness
- Investigation and Prosecution

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In 1996 the Minnesota Legislature created the Auto Theft Prevention Program. This program is funded from a surcharge that is collected from automobile insurance carriers that provide comprehensive insurance coverage issued in the State of Minnesota. The amount of the surcharge is \$.50 cents per vehicle for every six months of coverage. Utilizing this funding, the program makes money available through a competitive grant process for activities to address the problem of auto theft in the State of Minnesota.

In July of 2004, the Auto Theft Prevention Program was transferred to the Department of Commerce. The Department of Public Safety, Office of Justice Programs continued to administer the program via an interagency agreement between the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Commerce.

EXTENT OF AUTO THEFT IN MINNESOTA

In 2004, there were 13,410 motor vehicles stolen in Minnesota with a value of \$41,701,648. This figure represents nine percent of property crimes in Minnesota and indicates a theft rate of 265 per 100,000 residents, an average of 37 per day.

Thieves target a wide range of popular passenger vehicles, often seeking valuable parts from older model year vehicles for sale on the black market.

The top ten most stolen vehicles in Minnesota are:

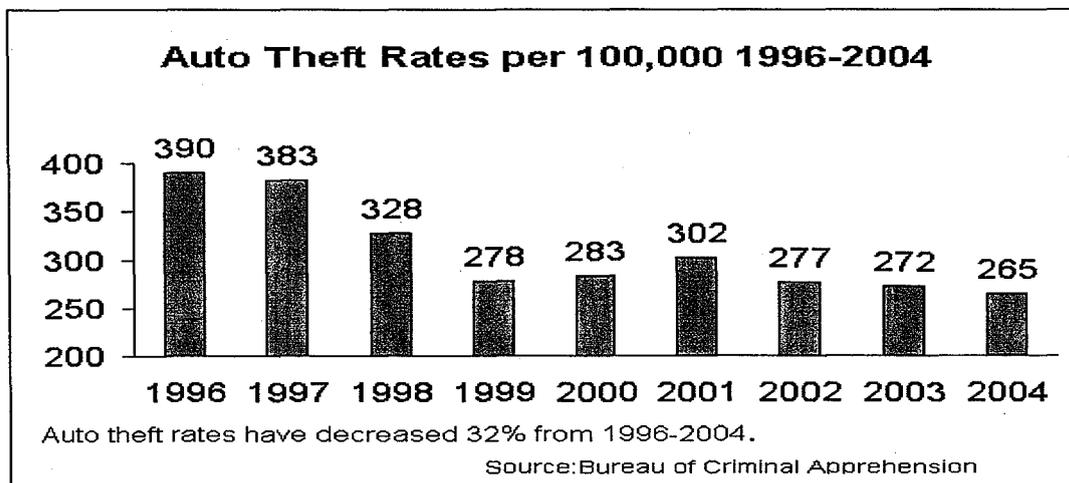
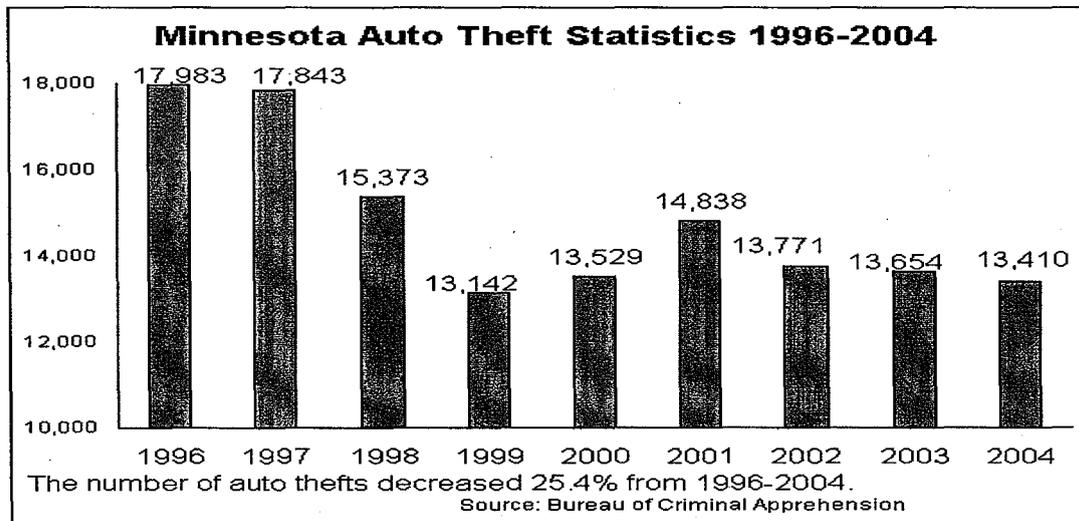
<u>Rank</u>	<u>Year - Make - Model</u>
1	1995 Honda Civic
2	1991 Toyota Camry
3	1989 Oldsmobile Cutlass
4	1994 Honda Accord
5	1996 Chevrolet Blazer
6	1992 Buick Century
7	1993 Saturn SL
8	1992 Dodge Caravan
9	1996 Ford Explorer
10	1994 Chevrolet Full Size C/K 1500 Pickup

Source: NICB

Auto Thefts in Major Cities and Counties in Minnesota, 1996 and 2004

	1996	2004	%Change 1996-2004
Anoka County	950	788	-17.1%
Fridley	145	130	-10.3%
Coon Rapids	173	119	-31.2%
Dakota County	849	575	-32.3%
Burnsville	227	108	-52.4%
W. St. Paul	110	93	-15.5%
Hennepin County	7,674	5,193	-32.3%
Minneapolis	5,650	3,651	-35.4%
Bloomington	396	219	-44.7%
Brooklyn Park	230	292	27.0%
Olmsted Co. (Rochester)	145	149	2.8%
Ramsey County	3,278	2,619	-20.1%
St. Paul	2,638	1,944	-26.3%
Maplewood	168	187	11.3%
Roseville	130	127	-2.3%
St. Louis County	583	426	-26.9%
Duluth	398	247	-37.9%
Stearns Co. (St. Cloud)	206	116	-43.7%
Washington County	329	395	20.1%

Source: Bureau of Criminal Apprehension



TYPES OF THEFT & TRENDS

Historical data indicates that vehicle thefts often occur in two distinct areas that conform to a time frame. In most circumstances, thefts occur either in residential areas in the late evening and early morning hours, or in commercial areas in the mid-day hours. In both cases, the perpetrators easily elude observation.

- Thefts of Opportunity – It remains that many autos are stolen because the auto was left unattended with keys left in them.
- Use of counterfeit cashier and payroll checks to purchase vehicles from a private party.
- Gangs stripping cars for profit.
- Identity theft. 1) Use of another's identity to fraudulently purchase or lease a new or used vehicle, or 2) Thieves use personal information found within a stolen vehicle for identity theft purposes.
- Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) switching.
- Increased thefts from auto dealer's sales lots. These cases typically involve either a customer not returning from a test drive or a dealer noticing a vehicle missing from inventory when inventory is checked. Dealerships fail to account for keys to cars on the sales lots.
- Increased theft of high-priced luxury vehicles and SUVs.
- Use of stolen vehicles as a commodity for purchasing drugs.
- "Dope Rentals" – Offender claims to have "rented" the car in exchange for controlled substances.
- Auto thefts that tie in with burglaries in which vehicles were parked at homes. The vehicle is used as a moving van.

PROFILE OF PERPETRATORS

The profile of auto thieves has not changed significantly over the last year. There are generally two types of motor vehicle thieves; opportunists and professionals.

- Young males in their 20's taking advantage of crimes of opportunity. This includes taking vehicles when no one is around and the keys are left in the ignition, as well as taking vehicles that are running or warming up in the cold weather.
- Perpetrator who needs a vehicle for transportation to ride across town; locates a vehicle with the keys in the ignition, and takes it to his or her destination. In a number of cases, the perpetrator has continued to use the stolen vehicle as his or her mode of transportation, often disguising the vehicle with stolen license plates or placing some type of temporary license on the vehicle to avoid detection.
- Thieves on a crime spree. They will steal a vehicle drive it somewhere, drop it off, and steal another vehicle and so on.
- Perpetrator stealing motor vehicles for a living and later selling the vehicle or its component parts.

- Person or persons stealing the vehicles often obtain the vehicle on behalf of another criminal, who then facilitates in the later transfer or cutting up of the vehicle.
- An organized group of individuals led by "habitual offenders" who steal cars along with their associated crimes such as the use of counterfeit cashier checks and payroll checks to purchase vehicles.
- In some cases where the perpetrator was identified, it was learned that they are often paid in drugs. If they are paid in cash, they often use the money to support a drug habit.
- Juvenile "joyrider".
- Juvenile affiliated with a gang or gang initiation.

TYPES OF PROJECTS FUNDED

Grant applications are solicited from county attorney's offices, law enforcement agencies, neighborhood and community organizations, and business organizations. Priority is given to proposed projects that 1) establish or enhance a collaborative effort between two or more agencies, 2) include counties or regions with the greatest rates of automobile theft, 3) employ proven or promising strategies that reduce the incidence of automobile theft, or 4) address automobile theft that is perpetrated as part of a criminal enterprise.

Applications may be submitted for the following types of projects:

1. Training (criminal justice, citizen and business, etc.)
2. Public Education (public meetings, literature, public service announcements, neighborhood and business watch promotions, etc.)
3. Programs designed to improve or expand the resources of existing auto theft prevention, investigation, apprehension, or prosecution activities.
4. Multi-Jurisdictional projects combining the resources of different agencies in the task force approach to combat auto theft.
5. Long-term specialized training to further the expertise of auto theft investigators or prosecutors.

PROGRAM RESULTS

All of the Auto Theft Prevention grants were funded for the period January 1, 2004 – June 30, 2005. Grantees and grant amounts are listed in the appendix.

Grant recipients complete statistical and narrative reports on a quarterly basis. The following auto theft statistics are generated from reports from ten grant funded law enforcement agencies and four county attorney offices over the entire 18 month period January 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005.

LAW ENFORCEMENT STATISTICS

- Number of Vehicles reported stolen: 9,394
- Number of vehicles recovered: 6,343
- Number of vehicles processed for evidence: 750*
- Average length of time from theft report to recovery: 6.6 days
- Number of vehicle theft investigations initiated: 5,070
- Number of vehicle theft arrests: 1,845
- Number of non auto theft related arrests generated by auto theft grant activities: 197**

* Burnsville, Minneapolis not reporting

** Bloomington, Burnsville, Hennepin Co. Sheriff, Minneapolis not reporting

Law Enforcement Collaboration

Early in the grant period, the Minnesota Gang Strike Force conducted a raid of a street-racing crowd in the city of St. Paul. In an enormous effort, officers from the Minnesota Gang Strike Force, St. Paul Police Department, Minneapolis Police Department, State Patrol, and Ramsey County Sheriff's Office came together to work on this detail. Investigators had received information that the street-racers may have stolen engines or auto parts in their vehicles and that they may have further information on auto thefts occurring in the area. Investigators identified 211 persons, issued 36 tags for driving violations, towed 30 vehicles and made two arrests.

PROSECUTION STATISTICS

▪ Number of cases referred:	
Vehicle Theft Only	3,123*
Vehicle Theft with related charges	389*
▪ Number of cases charged	2,331
▪ Number of convictions	1,587
▪ Number of defendants:	
Sent to Prison	228
Sent to Jail	576
Alternative Sentences	751 ***

* Juvenile statistics from Anoka, Washington and Dakota counties are not included.

*** Juveniles are not sent to prison or jail, thus all of their sentences would be considered "alternative sentences". However, 24 juveniles adjudicated for motor vehicle theft or vehicle related crimes were ordered to some type of out-of-home placement.

Significant Cases

Auto thieves have various criminal backgrounds and profiles. There have been several incidences of suspects using a check to purchase a vehicle at a dealership and the dealership later finds out that the check is not valid. Another common way of unlawfully obtaining a vehicle at a dealership is with identity theft.

The following is an example of some of the cases the prosecutors see:

- A defendant worked at the Ikea furniture store in the accounting department. This person went to a dealership and leased a vehicle under Ikea's name. He then went to a bank and attempted to open a checking account in Ikea's name. This is when he was caught. Apparently the suspect was going to intercept the lease bill and pay the lease bill with the fraudulent account that he and opened. Since this case covers many jurisdictions, the prosecutors explored options as to how to charge the case.

Dakota County Attorney's Office

- A case which was prosecuted and pled guilty is that of a career offender who went to an auto dealership and bought a vehicle using fraudulent checks. He later went to another auto dealership and traded in the vehicle he bought with fraudulent checks for another vehicle. He then took the vehicle to Jiffy Lube to get maintenance done on it. The defendant paid Jiffy Lube with a check, and asked to have the maintenance completed by the end of the day. Jiffy Lube was unable to complete the work that day and asked to defendant to come back on Saturday. The defendant then went back to Jiffy Lube later that day and said the he would like to cancel the rest of the repair work and get money back. The manager of Jiffy Lube said that he did not have any cash and needed the defendant to come back on Saturday. The manager of the Jiffy Lube found that the check was not good, and when the defendant came back on Saturday, the police were called and the defendant was caught. The defendant is now spending 48 months in prison.

Dakota County Attorney's Office

- Another case cited is that of a defendant who was incarcerated in the Hennepin County Jail, and upon his release from the jail was issued a check in the amount of \$.50. The defendant took the account number from the Hennepin County Jail and put it on self-manufactured checks. The defendant then went to three local car dealerships with a check supposedly from an insurance company as a settlement check and bought three different vehicles and received cash back from each of the dealerships. The defendant was identified and later caught and is currently waiting to enter a plea, as he has other matters pending in other counties.

Dakota County Attorney's Office

Catching and charging auto thieves can be as complex as a tip off that leads to an investigation, which leads to a search warrant, which can sometimes lead to a stolen motor vehicle, to as simple as technology will allow. Technology has proven to be effective in catching and charging auto thieves.

- In Anoka County, a 2004 Chevrolet Trailblazer had been dropped off at a car dealership for minor body repairs. It was left unattended with the keys inside for a brief moment, and was stolen from a location right in front of the service doors during business hours. A day after the vehicle owner reported his SUV stolen, he realized that the vehicle had "On-Star" and that it might prove to be useful for this situation. The victim called "On-Star" and within 40 minutes police located the vehicle in the driveway of a residence in Itasca County where the defendant had been staying. The defendant admitted to taking the vehicle from the dealership because he just wanted to "drive it around" and said it was a "golden opportunity". Since many newer vehicles are featuring this device, having law enforcement inquire about it when the initial stolen vehicle report is made could result in catching more auto thieves and victims getting their vehicles back.

Anoka-Washington County Attorney's

The following case describes the case history of one of a growing number of defendants with a large number of motor vehicle theft related offenses over a short period of time.

- On January 25, 2005, police observed an Oldsmobile Cutlass being driven in north Minneapolis without a front license plate and turned around to pull it over. Police ran the license plate and the Cutlass came back as a stolen vehicle taken the previous day. As police caught up to the Cutlass its driver pulled over and jumped out.

Police ordered the driver to the ground and identified him. The defendant was 16 years of age and did not have a driver's license. When police told him that the Cutlass was stolen he replied "I know, I just stole it yesterday".

The defendant was charged with motor vehicle theft and driving without a license. On February 2, 2005 the defendant admitted the count of motor vehicle theft and was sent to the Hennepin County Home School Beta Program for six weeks and other consequences.

The defendant is a repeat offender. Including the January motor vehicle theft offense described, he has been charged with a total of five auto theft related offenses in a period of just four months, as follows:

- October 6, 2004, he was cited for motor vehicle tampering. (In December 8, 2004, he admitted the charge and was ordered to complete Project Support and to submit a urinalysis (UA) sample that day, and to submit continued random UA samples.)
- On November 13, 2004 he was again cited for motor vehicle tampering. (This was later dismissed on February 2, 1005 as part of the February 12, 2005 plea agreement, placing him at the County Home School.)
- December 29, 2004 he was charged for driving a stolen vehicle the previous day. On January 12, 2005 he admitted the charge. (sentencing was part of the February 12 plea agreement described above.)
- On January 20, 2005 he was charged with driving without a license for an incident that occurred on December 38, 2004. That charge was dismissed on April 5, 2005, when he was order to the Adolescent Mail Treatment Program (AMTP) at the County Home School as well as receiving other consequences for a previously admitted charge of 1st Degree Aggravated Robbery that was transferred her from Anoka County for disposition Restitution was ordered on all charged cases.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

The following describes a case in which a "bait car" was successfully deployed to apprehend suspects in a motor vehicle theft.

- Police deployed a bait car in an area of Minneapolis that had been identified through crime data analysis as having a high number of motor vehicle thefts. The bait car is equipped with a video camera, microphone, and video tape recorder as well as a global positioning system (GPS). Its engine can be remotely disabled.

Dispatch directed police to the bait car after it was stolen by monitoring its position using the GPS. Police got behind the bait car and activated their emergency lights. The driver of the bait car pulled over. As police started to exit their squad car, the driver of the bait car suddenly accelerated, and the car's engine was remotely disabled.

The defendant was an adult male. Two adult males and one juvenile female were riding in the bait car as passengers. Because one of the passengers was a juvenile, the case was referred to the juvenile division for prosecution as a bridge case (a case involving at least one adult suspect and one or more juvenile suspects.)

The bait car videotape depicted the adult male suspects police caught in the bait car riding in the car talking about where the juvenile female suspect was, and about not acting suspicious. The defendant stated that he did not like being in a "hot" car. One of the other males then stated, "I know, she's like, 'Just do it, just do it.'" They saw the juvenile female and picked her up. She told them to give her the car when they were finished with it, and that she wanted to take it home. When the suspects became aware that police were behind them, one of them stated, "Say we rented the car."

The defendant was charged with motor vehicle theft and aiding and abetting receipt of stolen property. The defendant pled guilty to the count of motor vehicle theft and the stolen property charge was dismissed. The defendant received three years probation and was credited with 40 days served in the Hennepin County workhouse.

Hennepin County Attorney's Office

Cases continue to be presented for prosecution where a defendant asserts that he/she bought or rented the vehicle for some unreasonably low consideration, took use of the vehicle as security for a very short-term loan, or took the vehicle in a barter exchange for controlled substances. These cases often present challenges in prosecution because keys are typically in these vehicles when they are stopped by police and the defendant, by the time he or she reaches the point of trial has an explanation for driving a stolen vehicle.

- A recently charged case involved a 2001 Lexus reported to Roseville Police as stolen during a home burglary. Also reported stolen were the owner's purse, wallet, credit cards, and cell phone.

A credit card was used the next day to buy gas at a station in Roseville. Police reviewed the security video at the station but the focus on the camera was insufficient for identification. Minneapolis police recovered the Lexus several days later.

The investigator learned that the cell phones had been used and interviewed persons who had been called. One person couldn't remember the date, but remembered seeing his cousin parking a Lexus in Minneapolis. The investigator interviewed the cousin who admitted using the stolen Lexus but said he rented it in a drugs for car exchange.

The Lexus owner reported that property had been left in the Lexus that was not his. That property led the investigator to a woman who provided details about riding in the car with the cousin. Armed with details which were contradictory to those the cousin had earlier given, the investigator re-interviewed the cousin who then admitted taking the car from a driveway in Roseville.

Ramsey County Attorney's Office

- A more humorous case is that of the defendant who failed to appear for a pre-trial hearing for a motor vehicle case. Later in the day, it was learned that he was being booked into custody for theft of a motor vehicle at the time of his pre-trial. He told the investigator that he needed a car to get to court so he "borrowed" the reported stolen

car, which had a clipped ignition that was started with a screwdriver. Both cases were set for trial.

Ramsey County Attorney's Office

SUCCESSFUL METHODS EMPLOYED BY GRANTEES

- Public education and awareness.
- Targeting "habitual offenders".
- Patrolling high theft areas.
- Use of "bait" vehicles.
- Multi-jurisdictional collaboration and joint activities.
- Law enforcement and community partnerships.
- Consolidating cases with designated prosecutors in adult and juvenile prosecution divisions. Prosecutors and law enforcement investigators/police officers develop relationships so they know whom to contact for information or advice on these cases.
- The use of paralegals, especially in follow up with victims when a case needs further investigation.

PROGRAM IMPACT

It is difficult to measure the overall impact of the Minnesota Auto Theft Prevention Program due to the nature of motor vehicle theft. Motor vehicle theft is often a "crime of opportunity", with most vehicles stolen with keys in the ignition. In most cases the perpetrator is not found with the stolen vehicle in his/her possession. Criminal justice system response to auto theft report is generally a low priority for a number of reasons: 1) often the vehicle is recovered (although it may be damaged), 2) it is difficult to locate and process evidence that will promptly and accurately lead to a suspect, and 3) diminished resources for local law enforcement results in property crimes receiving less attention. Given the nature of auto theft, a successful program, involves:

- Prevention through public awareness.
- Deterrence through bait vehicle and "running sting" operations
- Investigation and increased collection/processing of evidence
- Prosecution and aggressive sentencing for repeat offenders.

Statewide and program data would lead us to believe that we are achieving success.

- In 2004, motor vehicle theft rates in Minnesota were at their lowest level since the inception of the Auto Theft Prevention Program in 1996. The theft rate has declined 32% over the last eight years. This compares to an overall national decline of 18% during the same period.
- Reported motor vehicle thefts in Minnesota have declined by over 4,000 on an annual basis when comparing 2004 to 1996, a decrease of 25.4%. The decreases have been most dramatic in the seven-county metropolitan area.
- Offenses are "cleared" by arrest or solved when at least one person is arrested, charged and referred for prosecution. In Minnesota, during 2004, there was a clearance rate of 19.0 percent for motor vehicle theft. Nationally the rate was 13.0 percent. For funded grantees, the clearance rate was 36%.

While results have been significant over the past eight years, an even greater impact is anticipated as we move into the future. Targeting funding to parts of the state that experience higher than average levels of auto theft appears to be working. Most of the grant funded programs are in the seven county metropolitan area and this is where crime rates and arrests have been most favorably impacted. In addition, after eight years, programs are using results to identify "what works" and best practices are now being employed throughout the state.

APPENDIX

Recipient	Type of Program	Grant Amount
Anoka & Washington County Attorney's Offices	Prosecution	\$171,700
Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of Minnesota	Media	\$157,000
Anti-Vehicle Crime Association of Minnesota	Training	\$25,000
City of Bemidji and Beltrami County	Law Enforcement	\$217,000
Bloomington Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$56,038
Brooklyn Center Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$126,320
Bureau of Criminal Apprehension	Law Enforcement -- Forensics	\$233,500
Burnsville and Savage Police Departments	Law Enforcement	\$55,000
Dakota County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$206,416
District Two Community Council	Community	\$20,925
Duluth Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$150,000
Hennepin County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$432,873
Hennepin County Sheriff's Office	Law Enforcement	\$40,000
Minneapolis Police Department	Law Enforcement	\$300,000
Minnesota Gang Strike Force	Law Enforcement	\$181,291
Pillsbury United Communities	Community	\$111,569
Ramsey County Attorney's Office	Prosecution	\$357,217
St. Paul Police Department (2 projects)	Law Enforcement	\$114,230
NOTE: These are all 18 month projects		
TOTAL		\$2,956,079